

**MINUTES
PLANNING BOARD
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2015
7:00 PM
HOOD ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Vice-chair: Rob Markiewitz; Members Gary Turner, David Pratt, Steve Lee, Eric Welsh, and Michael Ham; Alternate members Barbara Dement and David Barley; Town Attorney Craig Buie; Youth Voice Benjamin Dodson and Sarah Ward; Planning Director Kathi Ingrish, GIS/Planner II David Nelson, Zoning Administrator Mary Jo Gollnitz and Zoning Technician/Deputy Town Clerk Betty Lynd.

ABSENT: Member Eric Johnson

OTHERS PRESENT: Transportation Advisory Committee members George Sottilo, and Bill Stevens; Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources Advisory Committee members Mary Ciminelli, Howie Labiner, Tom Williams, and Matt Jones; Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources Director Corey King; Public Works Director Ralph Messera.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-chair Rob Markiewitz called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Mr. Markiewitz made a motion to appoint Barbara Dement as a voting member for this evening's meeting. The motion was seconded by Steve Lee. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Markiewitz introduced David Barley as a newly appointed alternate member.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Gary Turner made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 6, 2015 meeting as submitted. The motion was seconded by Eric Welsh. The vote was unanimous.

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR 2015

Barbara Dement nominated Rob Markiewitz for Chairman of the Planning Board. Mr. Markiewitz respectfully declined the nomination, stating that he would be willing to continue his duties as Vice-chair. Ms. Dement made a motion to appoint Mr. Markiewitz to the Vice-chair position. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lee. The vote was unanimous.

There was some discussion of who would be willing to take on the Chairman role. David Pratt nominated Mr. Lee as Chairman of the Planning Board. The motion was seconded by Mr. Markiewitz. The vote was unanimous.

SCHEDULE SPECIAL MEETING TO REVIEW ZONING CASES

Mr. Markiewitz explained that the Planning Board needed to set a special meeting date in March to review the three zoning cases presented at the Town Board meeting on February 23, 2015.

Kathi Ingrish explained that the three possible Tuesdays would be the 3rd, 10th and 17th. The MARA representatives would be unavailable on the 10th and the 3rd would be very close to the Board of Adjustment meeting on March 5th. Ms. Ingrish stated that the 17th would be the best date for all parties if it was acceptable by the board.

Mr. Turner asked Ms. Ingrish when the three zoning cases would return to the Town Board for a decision. Ms. Ingrish stated these cases would be decided on March 23rd. Mr. Turner asked if they chose the 3rd, which would be before the Town Board's next scheduled meeting on March 9th, would the cases be decided on March 9th instead of March 23rd. Ms. Ingrish stated they would not.

Mr. Lee asked if there were any cases scheduled for the Planning Board meeting on March 24th. Ms. Ingrish stated that there are no zoning hearings scheduled for March's meeting, so this special meeting could be the board's only meeting in March unless board members attend the March 23rd Town Board meeting to hear the final decisions on the three zoning cases.

The board's consensus was the special meeting date will be set for March 17th, 2015.

OPEN SESSION TO INCLUDE PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. Markiewtiz stated that the open session was based upon the feedback from sessions held by Town Council that the boards should share and talk about things going on to keep up transparency between boards. Ms. Ingrish explained that this was a perfect time to hold the open session because the Composite Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan would soon be presented to the public.

PRESENTATION ON DRAFT COMPOSITE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN

GIS/Planner II David Nelson came forward to give presentation. The public hearing for the Composite Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan will be scheduled for April 13th, 2015. The Town Board's decision date can be May 11th, 2015.

Mr. Nelson explained that the plan is a long-term planning initiative to ensure a complete pedestrian and bicycle network for the Town of Matthews. There are objectives to this plan. One objective is to update and build off of the Comprehensive Bicycle Plan which was approved in 2006. The new plan will expand to include a pedestrian network. A further objective is to standardize the terms and definitions between the different plans to ensure clarity and consistency. The composite plan needs to be a comprehensive plan that includes the aspects of all previous plans used. Staff would like to alleviate any conflicts amongst the plans in order to mesh them all into the one new plan. Once the plans have been meshed, staff can complete a gap analysis to identify areas where the plans do not link with each other. Once those are identified they can be created while current linkages can be strengthened. A final objective is to gauge the strength of the plan and measure improvements over time.

Mr. Nelson stated this Composite Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan is a combination of previous plans. These include the Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, the Mecklenburg County Parks & Recreation Greenway Plan, the Carolina Thread Trail, the Comprehensive Transportation Plan, and other various small area plans and past rezoning petitions. These are pulled together into this master plan.

Mr. Nelson stated that staff looked at the terms for facility types used within past plans. These terms were narrowed to seven terms: bike lanes, neighborhood signed routes, wide outside lanes, wide paved shoulders, greenways, multi-use paths, and sidewalks.

Mr. Nelson continued discussing the past plans used to create the Composite Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, giving their adoption dates and uses. Once all these past plans were combined, the next step was to update the master plan to alleviate conflicts. Mr. Nelson explained that the most common conflict was redundancy, meaning that more than one facility serving the same purpose was offered for the same corridor. Multiple facilities are not needed. One example of this is McKee Road. In this example, the Comprehensive Bicycle Plan recommended a wide shoulder, whereas the Comprehensive Transportation Plan recommended bicycle lanes. The resolution was that bicycle lanes provided a safer mode of transportation, therefore wide shoulders were removed. There were 16 instances of this type of conflict and the safety of users as well as accommodation of as many users as possible were used to decide which facility types to keep. There were two instances of needing to realign corridors due to external factors since the past plans' adoptions. There were five instances of conflict which required changes to the facility type. For these changes, staff utilized the National Association of Transportation Officials guidelines to guide the placement of neighborhood signed routes. They were meant for low volume neighborhood roads. A specific example of this was Mount Harmony Church Road, which was changed from neighborhood signed routes to bike lanes. A final aspect of the fourth goal is eliminated projects. Mr. Nelson explained that the only two eliminated projects were the Arthur Goodman Park connector and the Hampton Green connector. The length of the path was cost prohibitive according to a corridor study completed in 2012 by Stewart Engineering.

Mr. Nelson stated new projects and gap analysis, was the largest objective to complete. The first new project would be a connector from Barrington to the Four Mile Creek Greenway. This is due to Four Mile Creek Greenway's expected expansion and the limited number of opportunities to connect to it. This project will serve more than 400 residents along Elizabeth Lane and Barrington Place. The second new project is the Brighton Park neighborhood signed routes. This is due to the fact that most entrances to greenways are connected to neighborhood signed routes which facilitates safe travel to neighborhoods. There will also be a new neighborhood signed route extended on Creekside Drive in the Windrow subdivision to complete the neighborhood signed route network. Neighborhood signed routes will be added to Greylock Ridge and Rockwell View drives in order to connect to the Four Mile Creek Greenway. Crossing John Street there would be a recommendation for a multi-use path on the future Greylock Ridge extension into the Family Entertainment District. This was based on the Wingate Commons rezoning petition. This recommendation will ensure that the multi-use path would extend to Independence Pointe Parkway. There are also neighborhood signed routes recommended for Somersby in the Elizabeth Lane area and Thornblade Ridge Road. Multi-use paths are also recommended at Mount Harmony Church Road and for a connection between Rice and Williams Roads. The final new project recommendation is the Windrow connector multi-use path. Due to the fact that this is an older subdivision, there are no pedestrian options such as sidewalks for transportation. The plan is to utilize an old trail for horse riding that is unused within the neighborhood.

Mr. Nelson expanded upon the final objective which is to evaluate the effectiveness of this composite plan. Direct residential and commercial access to facilities and destination ratios were used to measure effectiveness. For each of these criteria, the new composite plan has increased effectiveness.

There are several recommendations of the composite plan, the first of which is to install some pilot neighborhood signed routes. A second recommendation is to create benchmarks or goals to continue measuring effectiveness over the next five to ten years. Dirtways could be used as an inexpensive way to model future multiuse paths until more permanent ones could be installed. A further recommendation is to consider bike sharing stations as a way to encourage citizens to utilize the bicycle network. The final recommendation is to continue communication between Matthews and other municipalities.

Mr. Markiewitz stated that he was impressed with the effectiveness measurements, but was confused on how staff would prioritize projects and obtain funding. He also asked for further clarification on the plans for communication between neighborhoods. Mr. Nelson stated that most of the plan implementation will be developer-driven, meaning that any future development projects proposed in areas that the plan covers would have to include the facilities desired by the composite plan. Mr. Markiewitz asked what would happen in the already existing neighborhoods. Mr. Nelson answered that regional coordination with the county would allow connections to the greenways as they are expanded. Neighborhood signed routes are fairly easy and inexpensive to install. Mr. Markiewitz asked if there will be requirements for the neighborhoods to communicate. Mr. Nelson stated that the process for communication has not been established yet, but is certainly something the staff wants to create.

Bill Stevens with the Transportation Advisory Committee asked if it would be better to just place signs within the established neighborhoods that would have short neighborhood signed routes such as Thornblade. Mr. Nelson stated that neighborhoods with many feeder streets would require more signage as opposed to Thornblade. Mr. Stevens also inquired if staff could envision bicycles on dirt paths. Mr. Nelson said this was certainly possible.

Tom Williams with the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Advisory Committee asked if it was possible to bring other small cities such as Mint Hill or Stallings into the program. Mr. Nelson said there was not any outreach to the neighboring communities in the creation of the composite plan. Going forward with the plan, however, it would be advantageous to coordinate with the surrounding communities.

Ms. Dement asked about the area at Sardis Plantation and Reverdy, stating that they have many homes in that area and run right down into the greenway. Mr. Nelson stated that they have common open space in Sardis Plantation that has already been identified as a connector in a previous plan. There is no connection that can be identified on Reverdy.

Mr. Lee asked if a dirtway was used, what the timeline and funding plan was for expanding Four Mile Creek Greenway. Mr. Nelson stated that he did not have the figures on that project.

Howie Labiner stated concern about the projects being developer-driven. This would cause smaller segments of the plan to be developed and cause lack of connectivity which would keep the public from becoming engaged for a while. Mr. Nelson said that unfortunately that is a possibility. He said that another possible way to implement the plan incrementally would be to have DOT help when they are completing roadwork in plan areas. Funding is also a major issue that keeps the plan from being implemented quickly in large areas.

Mr. Stevens said it would be a good idea to run the plan past Ken Tippetts who is the bicycle coordinator in Charlotte. He would be able to provide good feedback. He also stated that he believed the advantage of building out the thoroughfares was that the more paths are built, the more popular the transportation system will become. He suggested building the connectors first. Mr. Nelson agreed that the Comprehensive Transportation Plan did recommend multiuse paths along major thoroughfares. It provides the backbone to the networks.

Ms. Dement stated that Eden Hall should be included. That developer did agree on the other side of Fullwood. Mr. Nelson explained that he did not address that project but that it was an approved zoning petition. It starts with the Village at Plantation Estates, extends down Fullwood Lane with a signalized crosswalk onto Eden Hall, and continues through ACTS property to Bubbling Well.

Mr. Barley asked if the projects had been ranked. Mr. Nelson stated that they have not been ranked yet. It would be a difficult task with over 150 projects.

Ms. Dement asked what the next steps would be. Mr. Nelson said perhaps a ranking of the projects would be in order. Mr. Markiewitz suggested that they be ranked by the areas we control versus ones we do not. Mr. Nelson said the areas we control are more tied to funding that we would have to provide. Establishing dirtways would be a way to show people the potential of the plan.

Mr. Welsh asked how we go about corporate sponsorships programs for funding. Mr. Nelson said that would be something the staff would look into.

Mr. Williams asked if the Town of Matthews will maintain dirtways. Mr. Nelson said he would assume that Parks and Recreation would determine how to maintain them.

Mr. Welsh suggested looking into a tourism grant such as the one provided to MARA. Mr. Nelson said he would look into it.

Public Works Director Ralph Messera stated that the Transportation Advisory Committee worked hard with the Town staff on the Comprehensive Transportation Plan and there were some changes that Mr. Nelson brought up such as the multiuse paths on thoroughfares. He complimented Mr. Nelson on doing an excellent job on meshing the plans together.

Mr. Nelson stated that any future comments were welcome via e-mail and that a copy of the draft plan is available on the Town's website.

Mr. Markiewitz asked if there would be an opportunity for broader sharing with the community. He stated it would be important to get the word out so that the plan doesn't encounter future resistance from citizens in later stages. Mr. Nelson said that staff is looking into a public input session.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Lee made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Markiewitz. The vote was unanimous. The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Betty Lynd, Zoning Technician/ Deputy Town Clerk

Approved 03-17-2015